

# Ecclesial Reflections

## Three Contemporary Essays

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# 1. Contemporary Reflections on the Christian Faith

## INTRODUCTION

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF VATICAN II

To my mind, the deliberations of the Council are often difficult to follow and are of a style quite different from those of a modern democratic parliament or congress.

The Church, in its Catholic and Protestant forms, by the time of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was evolving quite differently culturally from previous generations. The Church after the 19<sup>th</sup> century needed to address the problems of a new generation or that generation would leave the Church. Cultural issues notwithstanding, addressing these problems was done under the guidance and with the power of the Holy Spirit as had been the approach from the foundation of the Church. The Church needed a plan of development that would allow it to adjust itself to changing cultural situations. It adjusted itself to changing cultural situations through the Council. A new world context required of the Church new solutions for its new problems. Briefly put: it needed new skins for new wine.

The Church is not merely a European cultural product. Its Creeds were written by non-Europeans and Africans. Yet, despite its universal Creeds in practice its government was European from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.

Today, the initial understanding of society and culture put forward by the Council continues to evolve. In hindsight we see some development, as well as lack of development in the theological, pastoral, sociological, and psychological insights proposed in the Council's four sessions.

The days of a State Church are functionally over and it is doubtful what advantage for the present time the Church has derived from this Erastian system. In the days of earlier Church-State alliances, Councils had been called by the Emperor to define new doctrines. Rather than new doctrines Vatican II was called to bring the Church up to date and to bring the reunion of Christendom closer to fact. In this process I doubt that the contemporary philosophical notion of Catholicity, as opposed to traditional Catholicism, was fully understood by all the Council Fathers and theologians.

During the opening session, some officials of the Curia, not desiring any up-dates to traditional doctrines attempted to manipulate the proceedings. But the Bishops refused to comply with their constraints. They arranged for inquiries to be made among the world's Bishops before any discussions were undertaken or schemas proposed. This proactive move permitted the Bishops to set the agenda for the Council.

What is the nature of the Church? This question had to be addressed by the Council before it could understand its role in the world. The overall work of the Council was to determine the Church's self-understanding and relationship with the world.

“Must church government be centralized?” was a fundamental question raised at the Council. Further, if decentralized, to whom would power be delegated, clergy or lay members of the Church?

The Council recognized that the secular press was a new factor in society. This was a significant concern of the Council. In fact, the Council acknowledged that revisions to Church government and the proper relations with the secular press are needed in order to advance efforts at Christian unity, and the proper understanding of the teaching of the Church.

The decree on the Constitution of the Church settled its contemporary self-understanding. With its self-understanding settled, the Council could discuss how to relate to the world around it. Such discussions sought to discover the salvific action of Christ which is at work everywhere in the world even, in non-Christian religions. Thus, the Council recognized that Christ’s salvific action does not confine itself to Christianity.

Further, the Council left moral judgments to God. It acknowledged that whether one speaks of the doctrinal and social troubles originating in the Reformation, of relations with other religions or secularism in the modern world, a substantial portion of the responsibility for past ecclesiastical failures rests with the Catholic faithful themselves.

The decrees of the Council may be divided into two categories, that is, world and church. They are the decrees on the nature of the world and the decrees on the nature of the Church. On the nature of the world, it was noted that through scientific discovery the present

age has a control over the processes of nature incomparably greater than that of any previous time. Further, improvements in technological communication have revealed that the human race is, in fact, a global community inhabiting the earth for good or ill.

The Council agreed that the social duty enjoined upon Catholics in the world is toward all humanity and not just Catholics. The Council reminded humanity that they had been created by God. Thus, the Council invited Catholics to reflect how their own failures of conduct or false presentations of their faith may have contributed to their neighbour's atheism.

The Council also discussed the merits of a just war. It continued the papal attitude of recent Popes that war is a great evil and under modern conditions could not be waged by any means that Catholic teaching would find permissible.

After four centuries it had to be recognized that Catholic unity, in the former sense of Christendom, had perished. The transmigration of peoples and the improvements in communications offered Catholics an opportunity to share their faith on a level not previously envisioned. This was done in a way to make faith relevant to humanity. In taking this opportunity to make faith relevant the Council built on social conditions already existing in the modern world.

In this process of building up the Church in the modern world the Council recognized that the Church is scattered over the globe rather than concentrated in a few particular countries. Thus, one may conclude that in the 20<sup>th</sup> and following centuries the Church



will be in a situation different from any previous era which reflected Christendom.

SECTION ONE  
KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH

REFLECTION 1: ON THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

Theologians develop thought systems which differ from one another given their philosophical bases. A theological scientific system can only develop and grow in sophistication given the faith of an individual and subsequently the faith of a community. From the Christian perspective a divine object, i. e., God, cannot be known except through some form of revelation. There has been within the history of the Church a quest for the knowledge of God by reason alone, independent of the Christian faith. Pagan philosophers attempted this and their efforts did advance the philosophically contemplative life in the process. For many Christian theologians their act of faith invites them to discover the object of their faith and develop an appropriate science of theology. The art of theological thinking can lead to a genuine science of how the mind functions.

Reason and experiment are the two foundations of modern science and through them the mystery of God can be experienced through faith. However, theology and science differ in kind and do not share the same metaphysical understanding. Theology requires an *inwardness* which is opposed to scientific objectivity which is a requirement for the critical investigation of nature.

Some critics would like to confine theologians solely to the speculative school of thought. However, the theologian is an adult

whose thinking is critically exercised, whose thoughts are reflected upon and whose content of faith is analysed in a concrete context. The mysteries of God are inaccessible without the light of faith which requires the assistance of a rational process. When defining faith, theologians must presume a particular theory of human existence and self-understanding. And, in defining creation theologians must presume a particular view of the evolving universe.

Western theology is not confined to the rationalism and philosophical methods of the ancient Greeks. The Greco-Roman culture has not exhausted human intellectual reasoning which is a universal phenomenon. The theological scientific system allows both faith and reason to receive the intellectual light of God. Given that theological reasoning transforms faith from a personal and subjective understanding of experience the Word into a universal and objective expression of the Word of God, one may conclude that theology is an existential science.

#### REFLECTION 2: A PARTICULAR MEANING OF TRADITION

A tradition is a living transmission from one generation to the next. Tradition connotes the continual presence of a human spirit and moral attitude. It is a continuity that expresses an ethos, that fundamental character of a particular culture which determines its guiding beliefs. Tradition is the expression of that continuity which ensures the identity of an ethos through the ages. I mean tradition only in the Christian sense, that is, the doctrinal sense of the Word

of God as revealed. Today, Christian tradition is often appealed to through an understanding of *ressourcement*. This is a conciliar notion, which denotes a return to the sources of the Church's belief and subsequent doctrine.

Philosophers and theologians attempt to open the future of belief to the spirit of renewal as they analyse the living traditions they inherited. Philosophical existential analysis is a question of universal experience, that is, the analysis of a catholic, as opposed to particular, experience in determining the meaning of tradition. The Fathers of the Council never separated the subjective instinct of the faith from the objective content received from preceding generations, that is, Revelation. For them there is no question of autonomy for the subjective, mystical instinct of spiritual ideas or entities. The Magisterium, that is, the teaching authority of the Church, does not have an autonomous role. It receives assistance from the Holy Spirit only when it keeps, interprets and defines the Revelation of which it is a witness. This is why the subjective instinct of the faith must always seek expression in the objective presentation of the truths, customs, rites and behaviour on which the Church agrees.

### REFLECTION 3: ON THE MEANING OF DOGMA

Dogmas cannot be given a new meaning different from that which the Church has given them and continues to give them. The “prophetic light” which is a message from God, came directly on Abraham, Moses, Isaias, Ezekiel, as individuals living in the Old

Testament era. In the New Testament era, it came upon the Apostles at Pentecost, upon Paul, and upon John at Patmos, thus fulfilling the Old Testament promise in Jesus. The prophetic light is the first kind of light offered outside ourselves which awaits our response. The second kind of light from outside ourselves is theological and involves an inner assent to God. Such inner assent reveals the essence of God and of all things.

I make a distinction between the two forms of the reception of dogma based on the difference of the group receiving the revelation. The way in which the doctrine was received by the apostles was quite different from the way in which it was received by the Church community contemporary with the apostles. One may ask: What was the inward event experienced by the apostles? Inwardly the apostles received a prophetic light of revelation, *apocalypsis*, which showed them in a higher manner the meaning of Christ's mystery, whereby their status as apostles informed by prophetic light.

When the Church formulates dogma through "theological light," the second type of light, or assent to God may it speak the language of its own age? Yes, if it does so in order to awake our age to the message of eternity; no, if it does so in order to dissolve the message of Revelation into the current of time or evolution, thus deadening the faithful to the sense of the Absolute. Yes, if it does so in order to attempt by the language of our age to make contact with those of deep faith. No, if it does so in order to insert the divine truths into the variety of ideologies in which the spirit of

our age lives, or in order to make Christianity, forgetting it's transcendence, the normal completion of an evolutionary process in the Universe.

#### REFLECTION 4: ON THE CHANGEABILITY OF DOGMA

In answering this question clear identifications must be made among progress in Revelation, development of doctrine and the history of theology. To my mind God has spoken more of divine intentions for us than of the revelation of the divine nature. God replies to the questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? What are we doing on the earth? Where are we going? Such reflection on human questions has opened the way for many currents of thought ever since Christian experience came into contact with classical philosophy. Official intervention of classical philosophy came into play in the understanding of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. By the end of the patristic age, the Byzantine East became indifferent to any further philosophical developments at explaining the faith in rational formulas. What the West attempted to define through philosophical formulas, the East viewed as *theologoumena*, that is, theological opinion. From a Western point of view there is no formal theological or philosophical development concerning Revelation from Eastern thinkers after the seven first ecumenical councils.

The principle cause of dogmatic and doctrinal development is the Holy Spirit. I distinguish five secondary “provable” causes of development. They are: heresy, theological reflection, the piety of

the faithful, liturgical life and the Magisterium. Protestant thinkers began theologizing from an historical perspective at the time of the Reformation. The historical perspective, which was not recognized as a cause of dogmatic or doctrinal development by Roman theologians, has played a significant role in contemporary theological interpretation. Liberal Protestantism with its emphasis on philosophy has transformed much of Christianity into a mere religious philosophy.

#### REFLECTION 5: ON FAITH

We all question the faith in which we have been educated and brought up. Many unbelievers experience more than an incapacity to believe. They consciously and deliberately cultivate atheism as a philosophy of life. The faith of Christians seems to unbelievers and atheists to oppose reason and science. For believers God speaks to them in actions, facts and events, that is, historically. God's word is unlike any human word in that it brings to pass what it says.

There are stages in the revelation offered by God to the People of God. The initial offer by God was Abraham's mystical experience of the alliance between God and himself. Moses carried on this alliance as did David, King of Israel. The revealed Kingdom of God, or Reign of God, changes the relationship between the twelve tribes of Israel which are gathered around the holy city of Jerusalem. Each prophet made explicit those changeable aspects of God's mystery which were implicit in Israel's earlier history. Anyone who does not understand the stages

of Israel's history from Abraham to Christ will read the Gospels, as well as the Old Testament, without grasping the profundity of all Christ's words and deeds.

Truth, revealed through faith, is of an order different from that of rational or philosophical truth. Experience as given to modern individuals requires this philosophical distinction. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century historians observed the rise of atheistic civilizations and States, not only of individual atheists. A possible advantage of modern atheism is that it may help purge religion from the magic which is the counterfeit of religion.

The first condition of faith is to accept a dependence upon an order of experience that is not philosophical, nor has been invented by oneself. Thus, for the faithful the Christ of the resurrection is not the mortal Jesus living again in a manner similar to Lazarus who was raised from the dead and returned to the life of his former existence. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus does not arise in this world; the origin of his resurrection is elsewhere. The resurrection of Jesus is at the centre of the Christian faith because it completes the Revelation of God, who from the time of Abraham, has been in an alliance with all humanity.

#### REFLECTION 6: ON MYTH AND MYSTERY

Myths are imaginative means, representations by which humans have tried to express their knowledge of God. Whereas, mystery is true revelation that God has given to humanity in the



Old and New Testaments as humanity understands these recorded events. We can ask: How can we speak of God in our present day?

In the contemporary world the Church is moving away from the missionary colonialism that was once practiced towards the pagan religions. Contemporary pagans are not likely to reject Christianity itself, as in the past, but reject its western cultural form. Today, many Christian theologians understand themselves to be completing the natural desires of pagans who seek out the true God. The “complete” seeker after God is one who is able to hold to a scientific approach to reality on one hand, and on the other hand to hold to a religious approach to the same reality. We must not be overly impressed by those who claim that from the point of view of the intellect it is impossible to produce rational foundations for belief in the existence of God. Science does not give us a method for knowing God but it does present a challenge for theologians in clarifying the distinction between myth and mystery.

#### REFLECTION 7: ON CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

There is a relationship between philosophy, as a formal discipline of human inquiry, and Christian revelation given to humanity. There is no intention on my part to draw up a system of Christian philosophy. For the faithful, the person of Christ is the embodied source of God’s revelation of ideas and principles which supply a supernatural quality to metaphysics. That is to say, those views and spiritual values in life which have become recognized throughout humanity since Jesus lived upon earth.

In the beginning Christianity was content with Revelation as given in the culture of the day. The early apologists saw no need for a separate philosophy. By the time of St Thomas, however, religious thinkers were more interested in the supernatural life than in nature life. As a result, the notion developed in Thomistic philosophy that nature must give way to faith should there ever be a conflict between the two. My conviction is that the notion of a Christian philosophy, something previously accepted by Western civilized society, is a dead notion which so far has not returned to life. I see a new notion developing such that philosophers and theologians are attracted to a methodology which is persuasive rather than deductive. Analysis and imagination are less important in the new persuasive method. The concept of a persuasive philosophy of Christian values requires a number of assumptions to be re-evaluated. They are:

- A Christian philosophy is one which prepares for, or announces Christian values.
- A Christian philosophy is one which has undergone Christian influence, and as a result, owes its formation to Christianity.
- One may understand philosophy to be Christian when it inherits ideas from Christian revelation.

Under a new persuasive method these principles may not be as tenable as previously believed.

Some of the Fathers of the Church suggested an independent, original Christian metaphysics. However, an

awareness of a Christian metaphysics was only clearly defined after arguments began among the philosophers concerning Revelation in the Church.

The metaphysical structure of ideas expressed in the Bible differs from that of the metaphysical structures of the ideas expressed in the cultures of India, Africa, Oceania and Greece. In the biblical metaphysical structure, in the minds of some philosophers, there is hidden the the germ of a reflection of Christian philosophy yet to come. Biblical metaphysical structure is a work of reason based on experience and is a disposition ready to receive the word of God interpreted theologically. But this is not a Christian metaphysic as such. The biblical metaphysical structure, is not imposed from outside; rather, it is the outcome of a human experience and understanding.

Biblical metaphysics, which rejected the gods of the pagans, was a revolution in the metaphysical, ethical, theological and political pre-Christian order. In contrast to a fixed and everlasting universe, Christian philosophers developed the hypothesis of a creation perpetually renewed and which, in fact, is temporary. The state of the problem had changed.

The supernatural goal of creation, that is, its metaphysical purpose, is a fundamental transformation. In short, it is nothing less than a divinization of human nature. To be divinized, humanity must have the freedom to consent to such a status. Note that such consensual freedom is reserved to human beings.

Who were the men that created the great systems of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages? This is the question I reflected upon.

During the Middle Ages, the word “philosopher” meant the thinkers of pagan antiquity, as well, the word “philosophy” did have a wider meaning equivalent to wisdom, knowledge, manner of life and one’s world view.

Philosophers appeal to reason even when they are investigating the wisdom revealed in the Christian scriptures. The philosophy of the Christian medieval thinkers is part of their teaching on God, humanity and the world. They expressed their manner of looking at each of these topics without always clearly distinguishing the theological and philosophical aspects in the sense in which modern thinkers distinguish these terms.

The medieval thinkers, as they looked at the works of the ancient philosophers, did not understand themselves to be faced by a system of thought opposed to Christianity. Their approach was that the works of ancient philosophers should be made use of but only as a servant or handmaid to the Christian perspective. However, oppositional thinking occurred within Christianity and give rise to the Creeds as formulas of correct belief.

As I conceive it, the epoch of the Middle Ages was established by the Renaissance men of letters and philosophy who ignored the ten centuries of evolution of Europe’s history and joined themselves to the ancient world. The Middle Ages is a time

between two epochs, antiquity and modernity. The Middle Ages may be characterized by five cultural periods.

1. The culture of those who founded the Middle Ages.
2. The culture of the Carolingian Renaissance.
3. The culture of the Renaissance of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.
4. The culture of the Scholastic/Aristotelian period. (13<sup>th</sup> century).
5. The cultural period of Nominalism.

#### REFLECTION 8: ON THE BASIS OF BELIEF

I interpret the question of a philosophical basis for belief from a perspective that does not rely on a particular professional school of philosophy such as found in English-speaking universities. The Church is not bound to teach out of any particular philosophical system, even though the traditional approach of Catholic thinkers to a philosophy of religion is characterized by Thomistic philosophy.

My premise is that it is possible for the human mind to be aware of God through various philosophies. I suggest removing the obstacle of endorsing a particular philosophy to support belief in God. In short, I hope that serious seekers of the divine presence will recognize the invitation of God implicit in their various experience and differing philosophical expressions. I do acknowledge however, that some individuals may have human experiences that are in a state of arrested intellectual expression and this presents its own set of problems for belief.

These problems notwithstanding, it is the business of philosophy to explore the inherited areas of human religious experience and belief.

#### REFLECTION 9: ON CHRISTIANITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Not until recently, that is, since the Enlightenment, has there been opposition between Christianity and technology. But from a contemporary Christian perspective many philosophers now recognize that such an opposition is false. However, philosophical problems still face the Christian believer who is a techno-digital scientist; such as the autonomy of the scientific method, the harmony between the spirit of faith and the spirit of research. Here I provide a personal reflection primarily addressed to Christian techno-digital scientists but also to believers and to all human minds with a sense of spiritual values.

Modern science no longer presents itself as closed system in which there are only certain facts to be learned, and the knowledge already acquired, to be perfected. Modern science is rather seen as an adventure taking the mind to new frontiers with new risks to be encountered. In contemporary techno-digital science new problems arise and we do not know how to master them.

In the medieval period all branches of human knowledge were approached interdependently and their unity was conceived on the pattern of a hierarchical order of the subjects that were studied in the universities. However, contemporary scientific methods are characterized by objectivity, inter-subjectivity and rationality. The

modern scientific method enjoys autonomy in regard to Christianity and other religious problems of humanity. Religion is, in fact, essentially a relationship of the human personality with the presence of God. As modern scientific knowledge acquires a broad inclusiveness of humanity, it does not remain confined to the objective study of facts and laws alone. It moves psychologically inwards through reflecting on the conditions of knowledge which make it possible for the human mind to apprehend facts and laws.

I am of the opinion that the origins of contemporary science are to be found in the rise of mechanical thinking, whose basic notions are those of force, work and energy, all of which pertain to human intervention and aim to make action effective. Within this context, some scientists profess Christianity, others are unbelievers with respect to the philosophical significance of the presence of God.

#### REFLECTION 10: ON GOD AND REASON

The meaning I find in human existence must depend entirely upon the solution I give to the problem of the existence and the nature of God. The philosophical or abstract conceptions of God are the result of a long process of intellectual thought and are found at the end, not the beginning, of speculative inquiry. As well, there are various notions of God that are closely linked with the different religions which divide, or better, are distinguished within humanity.

If there is a proof of God, it can only be a proof from reason and only expressed as a necessary conclusion from this sort of

reasoning. However, all arguments for a reasoned existence of God are inadequate and cannot make God explicit in the conceptual terms of human experience. Such arguments have no chance of convincing anyone of God's existence. That is so since one does not arrive at the presence of God at the end of a process of reasoning. But the presence of God is embedded as an act of faith at the beginning of the reasoning process. That is to say, God must be "there" to be reasoned about.

One could say that God is the beginning of a reasoning process because knowledge of God is not contained only in Christian revelation. The idea of God, as pure deism, causes no philosophical crisis since it offers no opportunity for the mind to be introduced to a higher and more perfect manner of knowledge beyond the conception of reason.



## SECTION TWO

### THE BASIC TRUTHS

#### INTRODUCTION

This part of my reflections is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the truths of salvation which form the content of divine revelation. I focus my attention on the two constituent parts of human nature, (body and soul), and the mysterious phenomena which form the subject matter considered by the metaphysical sciences.

#### REFLECTION 11: ON THE WORSHIP OF GOD

Only selfless love allows us to know realities beyond us. Further, only in so far as we recognize our Creator's rights over us can we fully realize our own nature, at least according to the Christian point of view.

It is through worship that Christians recognize their dependence upon God and enter into relations with their creator. Should they forget the command to worship, they lose their nobility as human beings. Without worship they end up practising pure humanism in loving and helping others and themselves, and yet forgetting to worship God. Further, without worship, Christians come to believe that true religion consists in devoting themselves to the well-being of others by drawing everyone closer together through a belief in humanitarianism.

The history of Christian sacrificial worship begins with the offerings of Cain and Able in the Old Testament and carries on right through to the life of Jesus in the New Testament. Worship of Christ crucified replaced and brought to fulfilment the different acts of worship of the Old Testament. Since then such worship alone characterizes the reign of God as Christians believe.

#### REFLECTION 12: ON THE TRINITY

A Christian is not merely someone who believes in God. A Christian is someone who believes in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is what distinguishes the believer from the pagan philosopher who admits the existence of God but to whom the revelation in one God in Three Persons would seem a return to polytheism, a belief in a number of gods. The thinking of pagan philosophers had led to one God, but not as far as the Trinity.

Only gradually has the mystery of the Trinitarian God been revealed. At the same time, according to Christian interpretation, God prepared humanity to receive the word of Christ, and his apostles, proclaiming that Yahweh was one God existing as a trinity of Persons.

St Paul's revelation about the Trinity differs from that of the synoptic Gospel writers in several ways. First, he is a convert. Secondly, he had a profound and immediate knowledge of Christ. Thirdly, his message was written in a milieu very different from that in which the synoptic Gospels were written. Those believers to whom he wrote had already received instruction about the Christ.

It was therefore, no longer necessary to teach them. But, only reveal to them the full breadth of God's plan for humanity and lead them into the life of the divine Persons.

St John's perspective also differs. John's message was written to pass on the message that Jesus had come to reveal God. Rather, than merely completing the message of the synoptic Gospels, John's gospel shares his message with the Christians whose faith he perceived to be in danger.

The dogma of the Trinity was eventually expressed in terms of human reasoning which became the cause of many theological debates in the Christian East which subsequently were "settled" by Western philosophy.

#### REFLECTION 13: ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

I reflect briefly from an historical perspective in the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from pre-Judaic times up to the Christian era.

The Israelites, being monotheists, never deified the winds or other elements of nature in the way other ancient peoples did. For them there is only one God, the ruler of nature. In their understanding, the wind, *Ruah*, is a divinely made phenomenon sent by God. It is God who is breathing a benevolent breath when the wind brings the rain and fertility, and a malevolent breath when it brings hot winds and no rain.

Further, the breath of God seizes the prophet and supplies inspiration. With the arrival of the Messiah, it was as though a

great wind from God, the Holy Spirit, had invaded the earth. The Spirit is no longer the visible and violent breath which enabled the Hebrews to leave Egypt and accompanied the theophany on Sinai. Now it is a breath of life, a breath of holiness revealed to believers.

In later times the theology of the Holy Spirit influenced other theologies and philosophies. A theology and philosophy of the person, the philosophy of relationship, substance and subject, and a theology of divine relations, all refer in some manner to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

#### REFLECTION 14: ON CREATION

The idea of creation belongs essentially to the category of religion. The theology of creation, like other notions in theology, has been developed under the stimulus of various philosophical errors which needed to be corrected. Philosophical errors about creation, from a Christian point of view, are to be found in the ancient religious and metaphysical systems, such as pantheism, dualism, atheism, and materialism.

The Israelites, during their exile in Babylon, had to maintain their own faith against the ideas that the Babylonians held about the world. What the Babylonians thought about the world and its origins is known through their poetry. Their story is of God's formative or organizing role rather than about any providence or creative act in human history. The coming into being, that is, the genesis of the world, was mixed in with the genesis of their gods which did not occur without some conflict and struggle.

The world of the scriptures, as dominated by the transcendence of the Hebrew God, is not the world of the myths or poetry, but of prophecy. The Babylonian world of myths and poetry is a closed world. The Israelite believers asked the same questions as the pagans, but a voice said to the Israelites, “Hear, O Israel.” They knew that this was quite a different world in which their worship on earth was not magical like the world of the Babylonian myth-makers and poets.

Since creation does not belong to the category of reason, God cannot be a scientific explanation. God is not the answer to scientific problems and the belief that the world is created does not necessarily imply any divine involvement.

#### REFLECTION 15: ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

I hold that the problem of evil is theologically best understood from the scriptural perspective of the Fall and Redemption. Thus, evil is reflected upon in the framework of revelation, not modern science and its practical consequences assessed in light of Christian theology.

Chronologically, the first explanation of evil is understood through myths, symbolic stories and popular renditions of the epic, lyric and tragic (pagan) poets. Lacking an idea of a divine government of the universe, the initial ancient philosophers do not approach the problem of evil as Christians do.

Within the Old Testament it seems that the first truth to be revealed was the relationship between human suffering and moral

evil. Later, Christian theology as a rational process distinguished between the two in revelation. Theology has not always existed in the Church. In the primitive Church the first need was to preach the coming of God's kingdom among the nations. But since the first centuries there have been attempts at methodical expositions combined with scientific and philosophical interpretations undertaken within the understanding of the culture of the age.

Contemporary philosophers continue the distinction between physical evil and moral evil. The evil of wrongdoing, that is, physical evil, is the result of a divergence between the will of the person and the will of God. From this perspective, the problem of evil raises a number of special problems for the human conscience. What is highly significant, however, is that although one can voluntarily resign oneself to one's own suffering, it can never be right to be fatally resigned to the suffering of others.

The problem of evil is never fully resolved and the tension remains between an intellectual understanding of the problem and the personal and emotional difficulties experienced in an evil situation.

#### REFLECTION 16: ON THE DEVIL

Is the Christian, careful to believe everything that the Church believes and teaches in God's name, obliged to believe in the existence of the Devil? Or, must the whole question be consigned to the indeterminate domain of tradition, legend or Christian folklore? If I identify Satan with evil, I must abandon any attempt

to make Satan an independent and eternal rival to God. If Satan exists it can only be as one of God's creatures gone wrong.

The question of evil is in the realm of theological and philosophical conjecture. The sin of the angels may not have been forgiven. The reason for this is that the angelic intelligence is intuitive. It never returns to things seen, nor reconsiders decisions once taken. In short, this means that an angel is incapable of repentance. The Devil was banished from heaven, not from creation. I can learn to do good from avoiding the Devil's example of evil here on earth.

What in this contemporary age is my position regarding Satan? Has the progress made in recent years by techno-digital scientific discoveries affected my position? Not really. Rather, I answer the question by the fact that there are certain voices that try to make me believe that God is dead, and that there is no God but humanity itself.

The reason God permits evil in creation is that it is philosophically unavoidable if supreme perfection is to be ultimately attained by fallen creatures. Recall that there is no necessity for God to permit evil, as there is no necessity for God to create. Philosophically, God's freedom for activity is preserved in either case.

#### REFLECTION 17: ON THE THEOLOGY OF GRACE

The nature of love, or God, or the Trinity, and the spiritual life are incomprehensible without an understanding of grace.

The Catholic idea of grace is essentially of something which humans, whatever their merits or efforts, are incapable of obtaining by themselves. It is something which human nature does not include. Further, human nature does not claim that which is not due to it. However, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas attempted a theological science as a coherent and complete body of doctrine.

Human intellectual activity is not limited to the conception of ideas. It must also judge the ideas that it knows. Among all animals, only in the human, do we find inclinations that tend towards the good as mediated through the senses. But we do not find the capacity through the senses to will the good.

As a human activity, theology is an effort on the part of the intellect to interpret revealed truths, but not to prove them. A theology of grace links together all the formulas by which the revealed mysteries are expressed and thus all ambiguity is removed in the mind of the believer.

#### REFLECTION 18: ON THE INCARNATION

The Christian religion is unique among all the religions of the world in that its founder, Jesus of Nazareth, was not only a man like the founders of other religions, but also the very God who created the universe in which humanity lives. However, I am not concerned with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. I am concerned with the risen Christ as known to Catholic dogma and theology.

Theologians, Thomists included, give different explanations of the way in which Christ exercised his free will. Some have thought



along the lines that the free acts of Christ can be conceived based on his infused and his acquired knowledge. Others have preferred to stress the fact that Christ's mind always enjoyed the beatific vision of all knowledge, but that did not deprive him of his freedom to act in the fallen state of creation.

#### REFLECTION 19: ON THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

The teaching on the Communion of the Saints as put forward by theologians has been endorsed by the official magisterium of the Church. The Catholic understanding is that the Communion of Saints will reach perfection after the general resurrection when time comes to an end. At that time the pilgrim Church will join the angels and Christ will return his earthly kingdom to the Father. All created beings will then be gathered round Christ, the one mediator, and his Mother, whom he had allotted a special place in his work and his glory. The Communion of the Saints will be the assembly of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and all saints, together with angels, in their millions according to classical Catholic theology.

## SECTION THREE

### THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

#### REFLECTION 20: ON THE ORIGIN OF HUMANITY

There are mythological explanations of humanity's origin. As well, philosophers, ancient and modern, have investigated the issue from their point of view. Modern scientists have sought an answer from their perspective. And Christian theologians have sought in revelation an answer to the same question. In studying the origin of humanity today the process of evolution must be taken into account. That is, the evolution of human thinking from mythologies to philosophies to Revelation to thinking in light of modern science and mathematics.

With regard to the origin of humanity it is possible to identify one doctrine common to all branches of the Indo-European family of peoples, that is, the belief that the gods were the ancestors of humanity. Inquirers need not restrict the search for the origins of humanity to Christian theologians and philosophers, who focused on the origins of humanity as revealed in the bible when philosophy was viewed as a "handmaid of theology." Since modern science is becoming increasingly significant in investigating the origins of humanity, palaeontology and prehistory must be taken seriously in investigating the origin of humanity.

There are two ways of viewing humanity. In ancient times thinkers regarded humans as static and quasi-supernatural beings. Contemporary thinkers view humanity as evolving in a historical

context in the cosmos. Just as philosophy replaced poetry and mythology in explaining the origin of the world and humanity, so science has for the last few centuries taken over this task from philosophy. Contrary to the assertions of certain philosophers such as Auguste Comte and the Positivists, it is natural that philosophers and scientists should cooperate instead of compete in this area of human knowledge. Science remains limited so long as its enquiries are not extended by philosophy. And philosophy cannot advance without taking into account the insights of modern science and the social sciences.

The answers to the question of the origin of humanity, given by myths, philosophy and science, revelation and theology cannot be accepted as being on the same plane without distinction. For the Christian, revelation is a unique source of information in investigating the question. What some contemporary Christian theologians now teach is that there is no true contradiction between these different branches of study. Rather, they are best understood as stages in the evolution of human self-consciousness. Mythology, philosophy, science and theology are at one in focusing on the appearance of humanity as a major occurrence in the origin of the universe.

REFLECTION 21: ON EVOLUTION

I distinguish between the scientific and metaphysical systems and between what is known and what is conjecture in discussing the origin of the cosmos and living creatures, including humans. Contemporary scientists view the world via three aspects. One, cosmogony or the birth of the universe; two, biogenesis, or the birth of life; and three, anthropogenesis with noögenesis, or the birth of humanity and of mind. The theory of evolution is an intellectual construction whereby modern scientists and contemporary philosophers attempt to retrace and interpret changes in the physical world as presented to our senses, either unaided or assisted by instruments.

To include humans in the theory of evolution is to make it impossible to hold a strictly objective view of the phenomenon of evolution. That humans evolve introduces subjective and metaphysical elements into the interpretation of evolution. From a philosophical perspective, the appearance of life brought into being a new status for physical matter as being animate, not just inanimate. Further, the chemical molecules characterizing living things are far more complex than those that the chemist finds in inanimate nature.

The “cause” of the appearance of life in these circumstances remains as speculation. But the concept of eternal matter and eternal energy excludes all forms of an external agency. To the contrary, however, the concept of creation, unlike that of eternal matter, implies purpose on the part of the creator-agent.

REFLECTION 22: ON HUMANITY

Even if the human being cannot be totally understood by reason, this unique individual is a self-conscious subject and may be somewhat known through the essential structures which constitute humanity and the human experience. However, no single, final answer can be given to the question concerning the ultimate nature of human existence.

The starting point for Christian thought on human existence has always been the first chapters of Genesis concerning creation. Humanity is the meeting point between the visible world of the body and the invisible world of the soul, which meet between time and eternity. Self-possession and self-mastery mean that humanity maintains its unity. This unity, which is not to be conceived as a number, is the prime characteristic of the human being in the philosophical-ontological sense, not the scientific-psychological sense. Ontologically, a person is fundamentally constituted through a relationship with God, who, in turn, is a person's source of existence.

I conclude that at the present time the function of Christian thought concerning humanity is to demonstrate that unity is the true principle of authentic existence.

REFLECTION 23: ON LIFE

Long before modern chemists had demonstrated by scientific analysis that human flesh is composed of the same material as the earth, philosophers had learned from direct observation that, from

the moment when life ceases to animate the material body, there remains nothing to distinguish it from any other material substance. Further, by the process of decomposition the material body reverts rapidly to dust. What then is the force which endues inert clay with life?

My aim is to direct the reader's reflection towards a solution of the problems posed by the facts of life and the functions of mind. "Life" is a word which indicates that philosophers are dealing with a phenomenon whose immediate cause and conditions they are ignorant. The most striking characteristic of the living creature is its unity, the way in which every detail is coordinated with a view to maintaining the life of the whole organism. Theologians teach that physical sexual union, which in the animal species suffices to ensure the handing on of life, in the case of human beings required the initial creative intervention of God.

The Christian understanding of human nature would be incomplete if no account were taken of knowledge derived from Revelation. Each individual person possesses a personality of its own. Its worth is derived from being individuated from the infinite and eternal presence of life.

#### REFLECTION 24: ON PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

I believe that psychology has, in the present century, changed the idea of the nature of humanity. This new conception of the nature of humanity imposes on the professional psychologist a responsibility for making the theories and findings of psychology

accessible to those who are influenced in some measure by these new psychological principles.

One's culture gives the person the mode of expressing his or her humanity, it is the mould which determines in a large measure what one thinks and feels, what one likes and dislikes, what one may do, what one wants to do, what one is able to do.

Individual humans are born into a society that carries with it fundamental responsibilities. They must consider the psychological and biological determinants of human action by examining the way in which value systems arise within a culture.

#### REFLECTION 25: ON PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS AND METAPHYSICS

Some modern philosophers deny humanity's ability to discover the absolute. However, historical evidence shows that humans are never without an absolute. The problem is one of metaphysics and the need to define correctly its nature and meaning. Knowledge is multiform. The history of humanity, as thinking animals, illustrates that human understanding is developed and realized in diverse ways. No one way disqualifies another. Although one way may be preferred over another.

There are ways of knowing described as "poetical" and "mystical" which cannot be denied without denying the function of reason itself. Some philosophers hold metaphysics to be illusory. But if that which is metaphysical is illusory, the illusion itself is

significant enough to constitute a phenomenon which must be at least philosophically established and correctly described.

The paradox of our present-day civilization lies in the belief that it can survive without regard for the metaphysics of religion. Obsessed with technology in all its forms, humanity has become the victim of the mechanisms it has fashioned for itself, but which it is no longer able to control. At the same time the sense of human philosophical values and metaphysical understanding is being forgotten.

#### REFLECTION 26: ON PSYCHICAL PHENOMENA

Psychical phenomena seem to imply the action of an entity superior to that of the soul, or of some unknown factor within the soul. The human mind, as either superior to the soul or mysteriously within it, continues to search for the certainty of a life after death often through a psychical means.

The interest in psychical phenomena is not reserved to specialists but may be undertaken by anyone who has experienced the phenomena and its problems. Within the context of our day, no satisfactory solution to the problems of psychic phenomena has been found or worked out. Psychical issues must remain unresolved until further opportunity arises. Towards the end of the nineteenth century modern scientific research began to investigate the origin and nature of certain paranormal phenomena. Often these paranormal phenomena were attributed to a human agency of a kind, that up to this time, had not been recognized.



## SECTION FOUR

### THE WORD OF GOD

#### REFLECTION 27: ON THE BIBLE

Many Christians believe that the Bible is a unique book in which all there is to say about God and man has been said. In short, there is no further new revelation from God, but only interpretation of what has already been given. To link this book with Western civilization alone is to falsify its meaning and limit its range. Humanity ought to appreciate the Bible for the rôle of guide that it has played in human history. In understanding the Bible, one must go beyond the literal sense. One must seek the allegorical and spiritual sense for correct interpretation.

Modern ecclesiastical authorities have invited church scholars to undertake biblical criticism. Biblical criticism is a discipline of theological investigation. This new discipline respects faith and modern science even though it may scandalize those unaware of the principles of the discipline. Until the invention of printing, books were manuscripts and further editions of them were given over to copyists who made various blunders and errors in transcriptions, albeit unintentionally. It was often impossible to go back to the original text and errors were carried over from one copy to the next. The invention of the printing press gave fresh impulse to the interest in the Bible begun in the Middle Ages. It became necessary to compare the various ancient translations of

the Bible with the original text and excise the mistakes that had crept into the later editions.

The deuterocanonical books indicate that at the time Jesus was on earth, Judaism was not closed and restricted to a Palestinian ghetto. Judaism's presence in surrounding cultures meant that Christianity could reap the benefit of the Diaspora's influence for those cultures. The Christian faith constitutes an act of confidence in the truthfulness of God speaking infallibly in the Scriptures. Biblical criticism does not aim at casting doubt on this infallibility. It aims at ridding the reader of the false ideas which are thought about the Bible's formation and content.

The people of Israel have gone through various historical stages in which a variety of their experiences sustained the role which Providence has bestowed upon them. Their first experience was of the nomadic life beginning with Abraham, followed by an agricultural stage, then a national stage and subsequent pastoral stage.

The people of Israel had no philosophical system, scientific approach, nor artistic heritage proper to their culture. Israel's moral code is essentially a covenant morality with a dialogue structure, that is, it reflects a call and response pattern. Thus, Israel's faithful experienced and discovered God's guiding presence as opposed to a obeying a fixed code of conduct.

Today, in the mind of some philosophers, *homo biblicus* is being replaced by *homo laicus*, that is, biblical man is being

replaced by secular man, who rejects God, transcendence, and claims worldly mastery of its own destiny.

There are various classifications of prophets in the Bible. There are the Prophets of Baal, the Prophets of the Court, the Sons of the Prophets and the Prophets by Vocation.

The prophets are heralds of a message designed to clarify and expand the terms of the Covenant. They presented the God of the Covenant as One and the pagan gods as non-existent. They preached that God is present to the faithful and alone governs world history.

#### REFLECTION 28: ON THE SOURCES FOR THE LIFE OF CHRIST

The evangelists do not present the Resurrection as a pagan myth. Rather, according to them, the events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth were entrusted to the apostles who handed the accounts on orally and out of which the churches constructed short homilies based on theological or liturgical points. Eventually these were collected and organized around specific theological themes.

The gospels reflect three historical contexts. 1) The sayings and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, 2) The liturgical, doctrinal and apologetic issues arising in the Christian community after Christ, and 3) The theological purpose of the author(s) of the gospel and epistle texts.

REFLECTION 29: ON SAINT PAUL AND HIS MESSAGE

Paul was a man with an outstanding mind. He was a philosopher like the Greeks, a man of action and organization like the Romans, and a man of feeling like the Orientals. It would be a mistake to study Paul's theology, metaphysics and ethics without reference to the situations in which he formulated his thoughts. He addressed converts, solved problems, and faced crises. Paul's world was not a secularized world and he understood all humanity to be "in Christ." The stages in his thought represent stages in his life and the Paul's being "in Christ" began at the meeting of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

## 2. MODERN ECCLESIOLOGY and the PRINCIPLE of *LAÏCITÉ*<sup>1</sup>

### A Philosophical Understanding with an Eye to Posthumanity<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction

This particular *philosophical* understanding deals with the notion of *laïcité* that differs from secularization as understood in the Western Anglophone context. This notion of *laïcité* consists of new interpretations that, in fact, amount to a shift in understanding the political conceptions of ecclesial and secular organizations. In the future, Western posthuman philosophical interpretation will not be undertaken from the same philosophical perspective as it was in the Medieval ages since modern science has given rise to a

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<sup>1</sup> Some Catholic readers may be familiar with Giuseppe Alberigo's understanding of the term as outlined in "Facteurs de laïcité au Concile Vatican II" in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, tome 74, fas. 2, 2000, in which he writes in a footnote: "*Ce mot est utilisé dans le sens du processus de 'décléricalisation' à l'intérieur de l'Église et non pas pour indiquer une orientation pour l'autonomie de l'État vis-à-vis de l'Église.*" My approach is the opposite. I understand the term to indicate the autonomy of both the Church and State from each other as organizations in their respective realms of jurisdiction.

<sup>2</sup> I say "posthumanity," not "post-classical," because while at first blush it may appear that Western philosophy has advanced beyond the classical age of philosophy, the high degree of technological intervention (unavailable in the classical age) indicates, not only an advancement, but an alteration of the human being's status within creation. Yet, many philosophers maintain that a classical understanding of human nature is sufficient in the modern world. But this may not remain the case. That is to say, "when computer science is combined with quantum physics and nanotechnology, the result may soon be a combination of a human being and machine" (Hellsten, Sirkku (2012:5) "The Meaning of Life" during a Transition from Modernity and Postmodernity *Journal of Anthropology*) [<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/janthro/2012/210684/>].

digital technological civilization. What makes this drive to technology so significant is that many philosophers still unrealistically believe that they are working to liberate mankind from its earlier fetters imposed by the natural order and classical traditions. In George Grant's words:

Man has at last come of age in the evolutionary process, has taken his fate into his own hands and is freeing himself for happiness against the old necessities of hunger and disease and overwork, and the consequent oppressions and repressions. The conditions of nature — that “otherness” — which so long enslaved us, when they appeared as a series of unknown forces, are now at last beginning to be understood in their workings so that they can serve our freedom.<sup>3</sup>

All aspects of contemporary life are affected by this new technological paradigm which continues to raise new philosophical questions, to which the answers cannot always be anticipated in advance. Thus, the modern context is philosophically existential and we are “here” in a new intellectual “land,” that is in fact a *terra incognita* from the perspective of philosophical interpretation. With respect to religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular, many philosophers are uncertain as to their understanding and acceptance of God and

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<sup>3</sup> Grant, George (1969:28) *Technology and Empire* Anansi.

religious faith from a civic political perspective in the relationship between Church and State.

Within a possible posthuman perspective, the central philosophical question about God becomes not “does God exist?” (which is the humanist philosophical question), but, rather “what place in posthuman conscious reflection do God and religion occupy, if any?” (The significance of this question for the principle of *laïcité* should become apparent as this inquiry proceeds.) Alternatively expressed the issue may be stated: has Christian revelation, as couched in terms of the past, been decisively received, once and for all, and accepted as adequate for future understanding? To answer this question the posthuman philosopher and theologian need to review the influence of “classical” humanism in the Church from an historical perspective to understand how we arrived where we are today on the threshold of humanity. It must be borne in mind that the movements in religious and secular history, though related, cannot be synchronized but each developed along its particular timeline. Given the many facts that I could have selected in speculating about posthumanity, I consider the understanding of the evolution of human consciousness to be key in revealing the dimension of posthuman theism, thus allowing for a new concept of humanity.<sup>4</sup> In the evolution of human consciousness towards posthumanity there arises the possibility of a revised philosophical understanding

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<sup>4</sup> For the interested reader Leslie Dewart’s *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* is a good introductory text. (University of Toronto Press, 1989)

of the human being as both effecting and affected by the intervention of technology and scientific progress. The increase in the intervention of technology and science in human affairs invites reconsidering a new ecclesiological perspective on the Church at the threshold of posthumanity. This reconsideration has begun in the documents of Vatican II, I contend.

## PART I

### The Ecclesiology of *Gaudium et Spes* <sup>5</sup>

To my mind, the phenomenological philosophical perspective evident in *Gaudium et Spes*, although not readily apparent to all, provides an opportunity to explore the notions of effectivity and affectivity in the human person. Thus, I explore this pastoral constitution from the perspective of literary criticism without specific reference to the orthodoxy of catechetical or theological intent, although they overlap. A task of modern philosophers has been to distinguish clearly between the disciplines of philosophy and theology. This task of distinguishing the two will continue to evolve within the posthuman understanding of intellectual activity. Thus, I seek out evidence of this in *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (the Declaration on Religious Liberty).

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes from *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes Divinitus* and *Dignitatis Humanae* are taken from Flannery, Austin (1996) *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* Costello Publishing (N.Y.) and Dominican Publications (Ireland).



The Council addresses the modern “world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, triumphs and failures” which includes many philosophical perspectives concerning the meaning of the individual in society.<sup>6</sup> In its contemporary philosophical structure and intellectual goals, the church “is not motivated by earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only — to carry on the work of Christ ....”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as I see it, the church poses no direct threat to the correct understanding of the principle of *laïcité*.<sup>8</sup> In reading the signs of the times the Council recognized a crisis of growth in human consciousness and that “in the gradual and precise unfolding of the laws of social living [people] are uncertain about how to plot its course” and that “if there is a growing exchange of ideas, there is still a widespread disagreement in competing ideologies about the meaning of the words which express our key concepts.”<sup>9</sup> As “competing ideologies” I perceive a tension between the Church and State. The Church, a religious ideology, and the modern State, a secularized ideology, are two differing images of Western society

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<sup>6</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* Article 2.

<sup>7</sup> GS Art. 3.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this essay, I consider the principle of *laïcité* as a current end-product of the long evolutionary relationship between Church and State culminating in the “Peace of Westphalia” in 1648 which, in turn, laid the foundations for the modern Nation-State. The principle of *laïcité* defines a place (theoretically and practically) for religion in society while respecting public order and public institutions. Vatican Council II recognized the autonomy and independence of civil society stating that the civil authority need not recognize any superior jurisdiction to itself in regulating its own affairs.

<sup>9</sup> GS Art. 4.

which are formalized and autonomously govern their respective affairs.<sup>10</sup>

Foreshadowing the evolution from humanism (with its historical examples) to posthumanism (with its speculations about the future) the Council noted that there are developments “on the intellectual level by the mathematical, natural and human sciences and on the practical level by their repercussions on technology.”<sup>11</sup> This insight is proving to be significant given the many and various studies in posthumanism and transhumanism arising out of the literature of science fiction. The Council further acknowledged that “in many places it is not only in philosophical terms that such trends are expressed, there are signs of them in literature, art, the humanities, the interpretation of history and even *civil law*: all of which is very disturbing to many people” [my italics].<sup>12</sup> But the principle of *laïcité*, when correctly understood, need not be disturbing to the religiously faithful. With more emphasis on a philosophical understanding and less emphasis on a political understanding the application of the principle of *laïcité* can have a positive outcome from both the perspectives of Church and State. As I hope to show, the principle of *laïcité* interpreted from the philosophical perspective evident in *Gaudium et Spes* can protect

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<sup>10</sup> In my view, as images in Western society Church and State hide their ideologies. The Church, in its relations with the State, conceals an ideology of a modified Christendom to which it hopes to return. The State, on the other hand, seeks the secularity of a neutral entity through ideologies concealed in a contemporary entertainment industry, the mass media and global politics.

<sup>11</sup> GS Art. 5.

<sup>12</sup> GS Art. 7.

the faithful from disturbances within the faith and lessen civil strife over religious differences in the larger community.

In Western civilization there is a need for a philosophy to serve humanity in its contemporary religious and multicultural life and serve as a preparation for a posthuman life. I suggest that an acceptance of the traditional concept of Christendom, a religious agency of cause and effect, is no longer adequate for the modern world and will most likely be questioned from a philosophical perspective within a posthuman world. In the Council's words: "People are becoming conscious that the forces they have unleashed are in their own hands and that it is up to themselves to control them or be enslaved by them."<sup>13</sup> In short, God is not responsible for everything anymore. I contend, it is from this perspective that the principle of *laïcité* is to be interpreted. Political ideologies, religious or secular, need to be regulated if solutions to civil strife are to be found that are truly human. For this to occur "the establishment of a universally acknowledged public authority vested with the effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for the law" must take place.<sup>14</sup> The principle of *laïcité*, properly enacted has the potential to point a way here. Quoting Hebrew scripture to affirm the divine origin of humanity, the Council employs the phrase "the image of God" in *Gaudium et Spes*. I find it a philosophical curiosity that it omits the clause "and

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<sup>13</sup> GS Art. 10. In this context, the visible presence of the Church and the visible presence of the State, both are signs of effective and affective existential power.

<sup>14</sup> GS Art. 82

in our likeness” in its wording.<sup>15</sup> Does this omission suggest an intention to direct theologians away from considering a status for humanity that may be greater than a mere image? From my Western philosophical perspective “image” and “likeness” are to be distinguished. The term “likeness” connotes a sense of a divine quality that the term “image,” with its roots in sense experience according to Ledger Wood, lacks.<sup>16</sup> As I see it, the Hebrew text, by employing both terms, removes the possibility of positing that God was dependent upon any previous creaturely image in creating humanity. But that is a thought for another discussion for linguists, philosophers and theologians.

Traditionally, human dignity or ennoblement was understood by theologians to be pertaining exclusively to the characteristics of the intellect and moral consciousness understood as one law when applied to an individual human being. In the Council’s words, concerning individual human beings, “their dignity rests in observing this law, and by it they will be judged.”<sup>17</sup> In short, dignity (ennoblement) was attached to the unique mental qualities of the human being which thus set it apart. In modern times, however, the Council noted that “there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, dignity (ennoblement) is now understood as constitutive of the

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gen. I: 26-27.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ledger Wood, s. v. “Image” in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Ed. Dagobert Runes, 1963) Littlefield Adams.

<sup>17</sup> GS Art. 16.

<sup>18</sup> GS Art. 26.

individual being itself (male or female) as a human person, and not simply as a quality attached to a superior intellect and consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Acknowledged in the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, is a unique intellectual development within Christendom, i.e., atheism and its relative, anti-theism. Both, in the mind of the Church, prevent humanity from attaining the “the noble state to which it was born.”<sup>20</sup> And yet, from a Christian perspective the faithful must be atheists in regard to all other gods appearing in the natural and unredeemed order. The Council is correct in deploring the discrimination between believers and unbelievers which some civil authorities unjustly continue to promote, especially through a misunderstanding of the principle of *laïcité*.<sup>21</sup> The Council seeks the betterment of the person and the improvement of society. While both are significant in the church’s teaching in *Gaudium et Spes*, they are not equivalent, but dependent upon each other. “The social order and its development must constantly yield to the good of the person, since the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way around..., the document states.”<sup>22</sup> I hope to show, then, that properly understood the

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<sup>19</sup> It is to be noted that from a Western philosophical and legal perspective, not all human beings are human persons. Being and personhood are not to be equated.

<sup>20</sup> GS Art. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Understood correctly the principle of *laïcité* does not require believers to become unbelievers. As a French text expresses it: *La laïcité garantit aux croyants et aux non-croyants le même droit à la liberté d’expression de leurs croyances ou convictions. Elle assure aussi bien le droit d’avoir ou de ne pas avoir de religion, d’en changer ou de ne plus en avoir. Elle garantit le libre exercice des cultes et la liberté de religion, mais aussi la liberté vis-à-vis de la religion: personne ne peut être contraint au respect de dogmes ou prescriptions religieuses.* [<https://www.gouvernement.fr/qu-est-ce-que-la-laicite>]

principle of *laïcité* has the good of the faithful and the good of the citizenry as a goal. Freed from the fetters of State responsibility, the faithful can then truly preach the gospel without earthly ambitions of empire. Such autonomy, if ever realized, will carry with it a responsibility to raise the level of human culture in the social order. As the Council noted: “To help individuals to carry out more carefully their obligations in conscience towards themselves and towards the various groups to which they belong, they must be carefully educated to a higher degree of culture” which is required for service to the community at large, believers and unbelievers alike.<sup>23</sup>

This task of carrying out obligations in conscience in the social order of humanity is to be accomplished by believers in the light of revelation, according to the Council, and not by God. That is to say, in the social order of humanity the believer is co-agent with God. The community of humanity “now produces by its own enterprise many things which in former times it expected would come largely from heavenly powers.”<sup>24</sup> Philosophically, human intellectual understanding within a “higher degree of culture” discloses the “creative agency” within humanity. Thus, creative agency is not reserved to God alone. Adopting this perspective illustrates a significant shift in the church’s self-understanding in the modern world. It is to be further noted that a human creative agency in earthly affairs does not exclude the presence of God to

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<sup>22</sup> GS Art. 26.

<sup>23</sup> GS Art. 31.

<sup>24</sup> GS Art. 33.

earthly affairs, according to the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*. Rather, a co-creative relationship between humanity and God is envisioned by the framers of the document. That is to say, in light of this document's pastoral intention I interpret the Council's teaching on material creation such that the human person (as being composed of matter and spirit) is part of material creation, albeit a unique part. This philosophical insight has great implications for posthuman understanding in light of an advancing digital technology. "By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These, as the methods proper to every science and technique must be respected."<sup>25</sup> It appears that the traditional understanding that "persons are *in* the world, but not *of* the world" will require a philosophical re-assessment.

As I interpret Chapter IV of *Gaudium et Spes*, it opens with a significant paragraph intended as an introduction to Part II of the constitution. "All we have said up to now about the dignity of the human person, the community of men and women, and the deep significance of human activity, provides a basis for discussing the relationship between the church and the world and the dialogue between them. The council now intends to consider the presence of the church in the world, and its life and activity there, in the light of what it has already declared about the mystery of the church."<sup>26</sup> Philosophically, it is worth noting that the "world" (composed of

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<sup>25</sup> GS Art. 36.

<sup>26</sup> GS Art. 40.

ethnic social realities – often recognized as national States.) formally and informally undertakes its own discussion with the church (a transnational social reality).<sup>27</sup> To my mind, this discussion presents an opportunity for the philosopher to reconsider the principle of *laïcité* within a dialogue between Church and State from a contemporary philosophical perspective.<sup>28</sup> From a political perspective, many philosophers recognize that the current political dialogue between Church (the faithful) and State (the citizenry) is not between equal partners, nor is it undertaken in a spirit of cooperation, but rather in one of confrontation and lack of trust. Suggesting a contrary view, the Council emphasizes that “by its nature and mission the church is universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system. Hence, it can form a very close bond among the various communities of people and nations, provided they trust the church and guarantee it true freedom to carry out its mission. ... The church desires nothing more ardently than that it should develop in freedom in the service of all, under any regime which recognizes the basic rights of the person and the family, and the requirements of the common good.”<sup>29</sup> To my mind, this

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<sup>27</sup> Not all nations are States. However, the modern notion of a nation-State is likely to remain a political reality for well into the future of global administration. It is currently the primary model for political territorial organization and the locus for the optional use of coercive political power. In understanding modern life many hold that political identity belongs to the State and cultural identity belongs to the nation. Cultural identity is characterized by intimacy and plurality of communities. Political identity is characterized by a lack of intimacy and a tendency to uniformity of organization.

<sup>28</sup> For those interested in a brief and alternative treatment see my *Religion and Governance: Re-thinking the American Perspective* Lambert Academic Publishing (2017).



understanding which is not exclusive is compatible with a proper understanding of the principle of *laïcité* and its emphasis on freedom for all. This compatibility deserves encouragement from all people who understand rapid social and cultural change. The church admits that it is open to receiving something from the world. The constitution reads: “Nowadays when things change so rapidly and thought patterns differ so widely, the church needs to step up this exchange by calling upon the help of people who are living in the world, who are expert in its organizations and its forms of training, and who understand its mentality, in the case of believers and non-believers alike.”<sup>30</sup>

After treating specifically of the family, love and marriage the Council considers the development of certain cultural issues stating that, “whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together” such that “one is entitled to speak of a new age of human history; hence new ways are opened up for the development and diffusion of culture.”<sup>31</sup> The principle of *laïcité*, then, properly understood as a modern philosophical and sociological principle belongs to the development and diffusion of culture, as I interpret the Council’s pastoral intent. As a philosophical principle *laïcité* transcends mere political opinion. As a French text states: *La laïcité n’est pas une opinion parmi d’autres mais la liberté d’en avoir une. Elle n’est pas une conviction mais le principe qui les autorise toutes, sous*

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<sup>29</sup> GS Art. 42.

<sup>30</sup> GS Art. 44.

<sup>31</sup> GS Art. 53 & 54.

*réserve du respect de l'ordre public.* <sup>32</sup> The Council continues: “In pastoral care sufficient use should be made, not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially psychology and sociology: in this way the faithful will be brought to a purer and more mature living of the faith.” <sup>33</sup>

The principle of *laïcité*, is an intellectual concept arising out of the mentality of the nation-State, often simply known as the State. Philosophically, the State itself is a human intellectual and normative construct originating in the science that treats of the organization of social goals. <sup>34</sup> The language of *Gaudium et Spes*, does not speak of the State as a substantive reality, but rather as a representation of a concrete social, political and civic community. The constitution reads, “the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free decision of the citizens. It follows that political authority, either within the political community as such or through organizations representing the State, must be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed towards the common good...,” which citizens are bound to obey in conscience. <sup>35</sup> In short, from a philosophical perspective, the mind of the Council is that the State is an abstract and changeable concept constituted by political regimes. In light of my philosophical inquiry, the following paragraph makes sense in the contemporary context. “The political community [defined by State

<sup>32</sup> [<https://www.gouvernement.fr/qu-est-ce-que-la-laicite>]

<sup>33</sup> GS Art. 62.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. James K. Feibleman, s. v. “Politics” in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Ed. Dagobert Runes, 1963) Littlefield Adams.

<sup>35</sup> GS Art. 74.

boundaries] and the church [characterized as transcending State boundaries] are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. They are both at the service of the personal and social vocation of the same individuals, though under different titles.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, to my mind, it is curious that these titles lead to confrontation, rather than cooperation in their relationship. As I see it, the content of *Gaudium et Spes*, and the principle of *laïcité* raise philosophical issues inviting a reinterpretation of “Church and State” that will likely continue to concern the Church and State in a posthuman world.

I now turn to the philosophical self-conception of the church in the modern world with an eye to the church’s possible posthuman context. In Part II I shall discuss the principle of *laïcité* vis-à-vis ecclesial self-conception. But first a few background remarks are necessary. The Vatican II documents that define the norms for a modern ecclesiology present a new model for defining the separation of Church and State that is more in accord with contemporary and future philosophical perspectives.

In light of these perspectives, I follow a Continental philosophical approach in preference to an American or analytical perspective. That is to say, the meanings I assign to terms and concepts will sometimes vary significantly from those understood and accepted by philosophers familiar only with American philosophy. As an example, American “civil rights” translates into Continental “public freedoms.” These freedoms are not natural to

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<sup>36</sup> GS Art. 76.

the individual human being and are not to be used against the State which has initiated and guards them. Rather, the State defines and limits a human right to be enjoyed by an individual subject to the proper authority of law. In short, public freedoms are acquired through law. They are not inherent in humanity. Further, such freedoms are realized by cooperating with the State and not by opposing the State.

Historically, in the West two dominant models have described the relationship between Church and State. The first is caesaropapism, a political model, whereby the religious authority is absolutely subordinated to the State. This is the most common model in the history of Western civilization. The second model is that of a theocratic State, often theologically and philosophically nuanced, yet territorially organized whereby the religious authority is independent and dominates the State authority, even when the State authority espouses, to some degree, religious values. As either model evolves into the postmodern era, religious power ought not to be a consequence of the legislation of the State. As part of the definition of the modern State the political authority possesses a monopoly and the legitimate use of force or power over its citizens. This understanding is characteristic of the traditional separation of Church and State expressed in the form of a Concordat which is the type of State policy with respect to the Catholic religion. The modern Concordat, in fact, amounts to an arrangement of a religious ideology vis-à-vis a State ideology with each independent and autonomous in its own realm. In this essay I

accept that perspective and in Part II I focus on the principle of *laïcité* and the self-conception of the Church.

## PART II

### Ecclesial Self-Conception and the Principle of *Laïcité*

In this part of the essay, I discuss some clues buried in the two documents, *The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* and *The Declaration on Religious Liberty* revealing a proper understanding of the principle of *laïcité* from the Church's perspective. In the relationship between the Church and State, the church is not an equal partner as was noted above seen since the Church is not a modern State in any sense of the word. The Church conceives itself as a community of believers united in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, and founded upon the apostles.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the principles of missionary activity are not expressed a political language of State, but in a theological language of a hierarchical community. Concerning the Second Vatican Council, Robert Adolfs insightfully notes that “essentially, the Council was little more than a professional discussion between administrators of the Church, but popular imagination turned it into a spiritual rebirth of the Church. ... But the real limitation of the Council was this — it was in principle an affair of the clergy...,” plus, from my perspective, acting as if they constituted a modern State.<sup>38</sup> Although evident in particular situations, the self-understanding of

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<sup>37</sup> *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, (MA) Para. 1

<sup>38</sup> Adolfs, Robert (1966:9) *The Grave of God* Harper & Row.

the church universal is evident in the norms of missionary activity applied within non-catechized nations. “Although the church possesses in itself the totality and fullness of the means of salvation, it does not always, in fact cannot, use every one of them immediately, but it has to make beginnings and work by slow stages to give effect to God’s plan.”<sup>39</sup> In short, in the modern world humans share agency with God. Whether God’s plan is “fixed” or is open to development in cooperation with humans remains a debateable philosophical issue, to my mind. I favour the latter.

Missionary activity implants the structure of a collegiate hierarchy, characteristic of the church universal, in the nations. However, this hierarchy is conceived as an administrative authority of a world-wide communion without any territory traditionally characteristic of a State. The exception, of course, is the Vatican City State administered by this same authority whose head of State is the Pope. Thus, one could argue that in the modern world there are two socially organized representatives of the church, i.e., the universal Christian community and a particular city state, i.e., the Vatican. This distinction is significant for a proper understanding of the civic principle of *laïcité*. The universal ecclesial community is composed of individuals conceived within the understanding of a particular Christian human nature within creation. This is in contrast to the modern State which conceives of no particular human nature except that of the citizen who is “equal” within its

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<sup>39</sup> MA Para. 6.

boundaries, i.e., no one is above its law. Thus, in light of modern philosophy, “Church vs State” could be re-phrased as “Christian human nature” (subject to God) vs “the egalitarian human nature of the State” subject to no authority above the State. Or, alternatively conceived, in light of contemporary ecclesiology, what is the status of the Christian understanding of human nature in a State espousing the principle of *laïcité*? In interpreting this question, confrontation ought to be replaced by cooperation, since Christian and secular philosophical perspectives both seek the betterment of the person and its environment in the modern world.

While interested in its status within the State, “the church, nevertheless, has no desire to become involved in the government of the temporal order,”<sup>40</sup> which would thus free it from competing with the civil authority, as I interpret it. However, the lay Christian faithful, (distinguished from the faithful as hierarchy) have a particular task to fill in missionary activity. “The laity, that is Christians who have been incorporated into Christ and live in the world, are of primary importance and worthy of special care. It is for them, imbued with the Spirit of Christ, to be a leaven animating and directing the temporal order from within, so that everything is always carried out in accordance with the will of Christ.”<sup>41</sup> The laity are thus assigned the responsibility for the regulation of the temporal order, or that of politics. Therefore, Christians, within an egalitarian human community, are organized along norms

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<sup>40</sup> MA Para. 12.

<sup>41</sup> MA Para. 15.

characteristic of a civic state as evidenced in this Decree. The assembly of the faithful constitutes a social life which has a stability and permanence and its own officials as leaders (priests) who are subject to an overseer (a bishop). Thus, lay people living within the State's boundaries are to establish an order of love and justice by means of apostolic and civil action "embodied in suitable canonical legislation."<sup>42</sup> The hierarchy for its part seems to have a different role vis-à-vis the State. "Bishops and priests must think and live with the universal church, becoming more and more imbued with a sense of Christ and the church."<sup>43</sup> As I see it, the principle of *laïcité* only pertains to lay Christians since the hierarchy has already excluded itself from temporal affairs. This fact is further reinforced by the Decree when it states that "the church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. ... The lay faithful belong fully to the people of God and civil society. They belong to the nation into which they were born...."<sup>44</sup>

In its present structure, one aspect of the church is organized in a way that mirrors the structure of the modern secular State, without being a State. The overseeing body of the missionary organization is the Propagation of the Faith which functions as coordinator of ecclesial activity throughout the world following the constitutional pattern of the church's contemporary self-

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<sup>42</sup> MA Para. 19.

<sup>43</sup> MA Para. 19.

<sup>44</sup> MA Para. 21.



conception. The Decree notes that “this congregation should be both an instrument of administration and an organ of dynamic direction, that it should use scientific methods and instruments adapted to modern conditions, that it be guided by present-day research in theology, methodology and pastoral missionary work.”

<sup>45</sup> Notably absent is the role of philosophy in the church’s orientation towards the future in which religion and science will most likely dominate human culture for some time. It seems, however, that classical philosophy continues to suffice according to the view of the Council Fathers for the good of the missions and for the good of the church at large. But an appropriate change in philosophical thinking can be envisioned as humanity moves to a posthuman stage from my perspective. A change in philosophical thinking will no doubt have profound effect on the relationship between Church and State.

The *Declaration on Religious Liberty* also reflects modern notions in accord with the principle of *laïcité* promoted by the State. This Declaration notes that people today “demand constitutional limitation of the powers of government” when responsible freedom, ecclesial or civil, is exercised within their community. <sup>46</sup> As I read the signs of the times, the following paragraph from the Declaration would receive little, if any, objection from the promoters of the contemporary principle of *laïcité*. “The Vatican council declares that the human person has a

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<sup>45</sup> MA Para. 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Declaration on Religious Liberty* (RL) Para. 1.

right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that everyone should be immune from coercion by individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, no men or women are forced to act against their convictions nor are any persons to be restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others. ... This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.”<sup>47</sup> Besides religious freedom, among civil rights (public freedoms) is the expectation by citizens to be free from any civil strife caused by the differences of belief or culture among religious bodies. The principle of *laïcité* seeks harmony within the State by regulating the signs of religious belief, or convictions, by citizens authorized by the State to exercise legitimate power. An analysis of Western history shows that a combination of power and religious conviction often leads to an abuse of power and a debasing of religious conviction engendering civil strife. The Council admits that civil society has a right to protect itself from abuses committed in the name of religious conviction. Such protection is dependent upon the civil authority establishing norms that “are necessary for the effective protection of the rights of all citizens and for the peaceful settlement of the conflicts of rights. They are also necessary for the adequate protection of that just public peace which is to be found where people live together in good order and true justice. ... All

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<sup>47</sup> RL Para. 2

these matters are basic to the common good and belong to what is called the public order.”<sup>48</sup> To my mind, in the modern world and in anticipation of a posthuman world, the Church needs to befriend the State and the State needs to understand the Church.

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<sup>48</sup> RL Para. 7.

### 3. A WESTERN POSTHUMAN IDENTITY

#### A First-Person Reflection on Life

After World War I, a new Western world was born, as it were. However, as J. Middleton Murry noted, it was really not a new world but the old one clearly seen for the first time. It was a new world for those for whom the lines of cultural demarcation were understood entirely differently from what they had seemed to be. This new world, at first, seemed cold, alien and hostile. Yet soon afterwards it appeared to have fresh hope as new insights were revealed and new lessons learned from a past and broken world. This is where I am today. That is, I continue to learn new lessons and insights about life from my past humanistic and somewhat broken, philosophical world.

In consideration of a posthuman faith life, I continue to seek deeper insights into the presence of God. I have come to realize that it is not how accurate I am in my understanding that is important, but rather how truthfully, I interpret my experience. I am not seeking objective truth concerning my experience, but I am seeking an authentic interpretation of my experience in contrast to illusion or fantasy which are tricks of an imagining mind. In other words, I seek what is truly real. And, any authentic interpretation I make must be made in light of the philosophical changes taking place in contemporary Western society. As I contemplate the

changes in my life-world, I see that phenomenological philosophy is not readily accepted by many of my contemporaries as a means of achieving authenticity. Not everyone accepts that the phenomenological method is one that satisfies and clarifies. To some, in fact, the phenomenological method obscures their understanding and thus dissatisfies them. Yet, in my case the opposite has occurred. Over time, I came to the conclusion that scholasticism with its dichotomous structure of philosophical understanding hindered my thinking.

I do realize, of course, that the limitations of scholasticism are the limitations traceable to a particular time and culture. They are the limitations of a philosophical language and speech that have not kept pace with modern experience. In my case, not even a revised form of scholasticism satisfactorily overcame these limitations. The revised form of scholasticism to which I refer is neo-Thomism. Through neo-Thomism I was not able to express satisfactorily my experience. However, given a phenomenological interpretation of my experience in light of a non-dichotomous relational unity, I was able to interpret satisfactorily my experience and thereby overcome the limitations of scholasticism. Now I am able to contrast my present experience with my past experience and act consciously to create a posthuman life-world. This means that I live within my cultural limitations, but I need not be constrained by them. I experienced these cultural limitations in my past life-world governed by a philosophy of classical humanism,

however, I need not experience them in my posthuman life-world. I attempt to transcend them even if success is only partial.

In my posthuman life-world the interpretive task is contingent and perpetual. As an existential thinker, I know that there is no such thing as a final philosophy or theology. I conceive my work as different from the work of the theologian in the days when the humanistic philosophical systems of the West were being constructed. As I see it, the task of the contemporary religious philosopher and theologian is as follows. It is to make known the truthfulness of *reasoned belief* in and about God to a new generation of Western philosophers through a phenomenological approach to philosophy, that is, through a dehellenized philosophy. I find that the principle merit and usefulness of a dehellenized philosophy is its capacity for giving a human identity to experience. Philosophy is culturally influenced. But, unlike classical philosophers, posthuman philosophers choose not to conform to a given system of knowledge, nor a methodology of established norms. Posthuman philosophy presents an alternative conscious understanding and as such it can utilize any methodology of interpretation. To my mind, any philosophy, even the untutored sort, can provide some degree of satisfaction in religious interpretation.

History shows that natural theology, viewed by some as a type of philosophy and as an academic discipline in its own right, originated outside the Western Catholic ecclesiastical tradition. Natural theology, as a philosophy, is the proper way of inquiring

into the world as created by God, rather than inquiring into God as revealed in the world. St Thomas held to this distinction, according to Edward Schillebeeckx. As an ecclesial theologian, I am required to interpret revelation within the *sensus fidelium*, that is, within the understanding of the faithful who constitute the church. But as a philosopher of theology, I am not limited to this ecclesial context.

For any serious philosophy and theology to bear fruit in the posthuman context, it must engage the personal (qualitative) and existential (quantitative) creative experience of the faithful. At one point in the process of evaluating my inherited philosophical understanding, I compared and contrasted the thought of George Tyrrell (1861-1909) to that of Leslie Dewart (1922-2009). I then compared their thoughts with my own philosophical understanding. In this comparison, I found it unfortunate that, at this time in the development of Western philosophy and theology, the place of philosophy in relation to theology has been usurped to a great extent by sociology and psychology.

Posthuman thinking represents a shift away from the old style of theological polemics towards a new approach of ecumenical cooperation among Western theologians. For such thinkers, theology, which traditionally has been influenced by classical philosophy, has shifted to a discursive theology, often interpreted through phenomenological approach. It was within this context of a discursive theology that I was able to make sense of my personal experience and re-adjust my identity in life accordingly. And in making sense of my experience, I found that I had to undertake an

existential approach to tell of my “that was then; this is now” experience. Being a theologian, understanding the presence of God is a particular focus in my life. My theological preoccupation has its roots in the Roman Catholic theological perspective that was in vogue in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly that of the *Nouvelle Théologie*. It was through this model of theologizing that I found the beginnings of fresh insights leading to posthuman thresholds of theological insight.

I draw the reader’s attention to the fact that many creative and insightful contributions from philosophers and theologians are often quoted and discussed by academics and professional journalists. These reviewers and professional journalists often truly believe they have understood, and correctly expounded the ideas of innovative philosophical and theological thinkers. And in most cases, they probably have done so, but not always. George Tyrrell’s life-story of creative and innovative theologizing is a case in point. The appreciation of his style of creative and innovative thinking is not as well recognized as it could be among professional theologians. Although to the discerning reader of his books his influence on theology at the time of Vatican II is readily discernable. The majority of academics have discussed Tyrrell from an historical perspective, often in relation to the Modernist Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church. David Schultenover in his book described, not the Modernist Movement and Tyrrell’s role in it, but the intellectual development of a major contributor to that movement by focusing on the man and his thought.



Two modern developments that offer some rationale for the creative tensions that exist within the contemporary Western philosophical and theological tradition, are also significant for posthuman thinking. The first is that medieval Christendom has come to an end and secularism exists in its wake. The other development is that a psychological understanding of the person has taken the place of a philosophical understanding of the person.

One of the often-heard criticisms of Modernity is that it sets up a false confidence in rationalism and science. Given their capacity in categorizing and explaining human experience, rationalism and science are often seen as being able to convey the totality of human experience and personal identity. Once I realized that this could not ultimately be the case, that neither of them could convey the totality of human experience nor identity, I favoured a posthuman approach which directed me away from the dichotomous Hellenic philosophical understanding still somewhat evident in the sciences. The phenomenological approach permits me to establish a non-dichotomous relationship to others in my life-world and thus re-define my identity.

The social institution in which I originally framed my theology is the church. Exploring the various denominations within the church is a specialized theological discipline called ecclesiology. The differing interpretations of the sacred texts by these denominations, plus the political, philosophical, and historical reform movements occurring among them contributed to a diverse self-understanding of the church. In a posthuman philosophical

context, the church will most likely not be a social arrangement *imposed* upon the faithful. Rather, the church will be disclosed as a communion of communities *constituted* by the faithful, each community with its own self-understanding, history, culture and tradition.

There is a variety of expression in the church which reflects the variety of local cultures. Because of the relationship in the West between philosophy and theology, my contention for many years has been that the theological problems of the churches are preceded by philosophical problems which need to be first addressed and resolved. Then, one may address the theological problems and their solutions. It was Leslie Dewart's understanding of "dehellenization," a philosophical notion which he did not present as a negative concept, meaning "unhellenization," that provided a conscious opportunity for me to begin to evaluate my philosophical inheritance and subsequently my identity as a posthuman individual.

Theologians who theologize formally on behalf of a believing community, are required to think as professionals, as it were. However, pre-modern society and culture were not oriented to professionalism, but to authoritarianism. A hierarchical order is the requisite form for any authoritarian organization structured for absolute government. In contrast, contemporary Western society and modern religious organizations are oriented toward professionalism, democracy and the principle of personal interpretation. Within the churches of the Reformation, the

development of democratic governance is clearly evident. For the hierarchical churches, both Catholic and Orthodox, the principle of subsidiarity fulfills the intent of democratic governance.

Contemporary theologians, both Eastern and Western, are beginning to realize that the present structure of church government which reflects classical theism requires change. The present governing structure of the church is based on a territorial notion and not on a gift of God's grace, i.e., divine charism. For an Orthodox perspective on "divine charism" Nicholas Ferencz's words suffice, I believe. "The key for understanding the authority and structure of the Orthodox Church is the unity of the church and, to a lesser extent, its catholicity. The church must be one for it is the Body of Christ, which is one. No division or split can exist in this body, else it is not truly Christ's." <sup>49</sup> The notion of territorial jurisdiction is an obstacle to the ecclesial governance of the church today. (Note that I say "ecclesial governance," not "ecclesiastical government.") And, as such, the church must change in the posthuman context. Such territorial constructions will not fruitfully conform to the Christian's social condition in posthumanity. Further, it would be a theological error to promote any idea of a universal territorial super-church composed of all the faithful based on the philosophical notion of human political expediency.

My philosophical reflection suggests to me that a posthuman church would reveal a new ecclesiology that is based upon the relationships among the faithful, not on the theory of ecclesiastical

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<sup>49</sup> *Ferencz* (2006), p.17.

territorial government. This shift from theory to relationships brings about a new personal identity for the believer. In short, it is tantamount to a conversion experience. Traditional political *government* becomes *governance* when based on mutual mature relationships. Present day churches, in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, remain based on a notion of territorial jurisdiction. However, there is an option for future governance of these churches through an ecclesiology, one not territorially re-ordered, but one that is reconstituted in light of a posthuman consciousness. Such an ecclesial possibility requires that I reappraise the development of my Christian identity. This is so because I am living in a culture that has not been envisioned or brought about only by one factor. My culture is determined by many causes. Among them are physical, metaphysical, mental, human, and divine causes. Indeed, my culture seems to be over-determined given the combination of these and other factors. By “over-determined” I mean no one factor can be held responsible for the direction and development of the culture in which I encounter the presence of God and subsequently determine my identity. Thus, I take this to mean that, in truth, God is not to be held solely responsible for everything that happens to me, or happens within the cosmos for that matter. That is to say that I have a role in the interpreting God’s participation in my life.

This role allows me to re-conceive of myself as a responsible co-agent in, and as a responsible co-creator of, my culture and society. This is a posthuman state of consciousness through which

I am able to work towards building the kingdom of God on earth within the presence of God. But not in any political sense. Rather, I understand it existentially. My co-participation in the divine creativity is the risk that God takes with me, as it were, which includes possible failure. Note the ironic prophetic remark, attributed to Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) about failure in the Kingdom of God: *Jésus annonçait le Royaume et c'est l'Église qui est venue*. (Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom and what arrived was the Church.)

The traditional Catholic understanding of the church is as old as the first epistle of St. Clement, (circa 75-110), in which the church is conceived as a divine institution. According to St. Clement, the church is an institution with officers whose duty is determined by an official status within the institution. In this understanding, the officers of the church are analogous to officers of the state. To my mind, Jesus of Nazareth would never contemplate endorsing any form of church government patterned on a model whose leaders were analogous to the state.<sup>50</sup> Further, it is clear that the apostles believed that the end of the world would occur within their lifetime, and they made no provision for an institutional church in the sense that it exists today. Yet, the spirit that animates the church today is the same spirit that animated Jesus of Nazareth. I argue that this same spirit lays the foundations for thresholds in Catholicity, not Catholicism, in the posthuman context.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Mark 10:35-45.

It must be remembered that while individual humans do exist, humanity does not. Humanity is an imaginative concept. Humanity, as an abstracted (imaginative) idea, is expressed through a variety of philosophical, political and cultural perspectives. Further, God may be conceived as immanently present, or conceived as absent (*via negativa*) in Western philosophical, political and cultural perspectives. Victor Segesvary reminds us that the concept of humanity, understood as an existential community of individuals, is too large a concept to be the bearer of a single shared culture. In this respect, the posthuman world will not be that different from the world of the ancient cultures. It is, however, somewhat urgent that I find creative ways to interpret what I am likely to find unique in the experience of my identity in a posthuman world. However, in interpreting my posthuman life-world it is more responsible for me to promote a reasoned philosophy rather than duplicate any previous cultural folklore in accounting for my experience. Psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, etc., assist me, to some degree, but it is only philosophy that is in the privileged position to support my theological reflection. In this reflection my task is to express, to clarify and deepen the understanding of my conscious self-development. In understanding my conscious self-development there are two pairs of terms not to be confused. They are “subjectivity” and “objectivity,” and “subjectivism” and “objectivism.” These pairs are not interchangeable. The former

pair belongs to phenomenology and is qualitative. The latter pair belongs to scholasticism and is quantitative.

Platonic, and some neo-platonic philosophers, continue to subscribe to ideal material forms in interpreting human experience. Yet, they do not admit to any reality of the relationships among these ideal forms. This understanding is not consistent with a posthuman perspective in which the “space” between subject and object, i.e., person and thing, must itself be acknowledged in determining human identity. This is another way of distinguishing between “me” and “not-me.” As a phenomenologist, I hold to an existential relationship among entities and see no reason to accept the platonic theory of material forms. I have adopted this position because my philosophical contemplation of being (my existential identity) has not supported the existence of the idea of material forms. All entities, be they living or non-living, are in a relational state among themselves.

Being conscious, I differentiate between that which is “me” and that which is “not-me.” I am aware of my conscious self, that is, “me,” as manifested through my body, yet differing from my body. I am also aware of “me” as distinguishable from other physical and meta-physical entities. In short, “I” am not my body. Neither am “I” my spirit, nor any meta-physical form separate from my body, i.e., my soul. Rather, as a human being, I experience myself as an incarnated entity (a unity of physical and meta-physical components) who is in a relationship with other beings, some incarnated like myself. By incarnated, I mean that I

am an “in-the-flesh” living entity possessing a unique human identity, i. e., consciousness. As a human incarnation, I exist in such a way that I can relate myself to myself as well as to others. As a human incarnation, I do not experience myself as a dichotomized being, united by the joining of a body and a soul originally existing separately. However, I experience myself as an individuated being, differentiated from others as “me.” Whether the human soul is immortal or not, is another matter that does not concern me here.

In my dehellenized philosophy, I recognize three unique moments of insight. They are: 1) the realization of my status as a reflexive thinker, 2) the realization of my individuality, that is, I am “this” and not “that,” and 3) the realization of my personal integrity. That is, I am not equivalent to my body or to my soul understood separately. I continue to become more deeply aware of the significance of these facts as I consciously develop my posthuman identity.

My relationships are formed when I distinguish between “me” and “not me.” My relationships are not determined through any *a priori* schema imported or imposed from outside of my experience, that is, from any pre-determined idealism, secular or religious. Through my relationships, I am conscious that I exist, not only for myself, but also for others. It is through my relationships with others that my identity occurs. Given my identity, I become aware of myself as an individual. And as an individual, I am able to place myself in an appropriate relationship with objects and living beings



of whom I have become conscious and from whom I am differentiated.

I, as a person, do not have the structure of an inanimate object. Rather, I am a being whose constitution is greater than the sum of its individual parts. That is, as an incarnated individual person I am holistically constituted. The fact is that I am devoid of any fixed or final human construction, but not devoid of being perpetually constituted as human as long as I am alive. Being constituted as a human being necessitates a hylomorphic existence, but not necessarily in the Aristotelian understanding.

In a posthuman context through the process of differentiation, which is how I think philosophically, I become conscious of the temporal and the transcendental (metaphysical) aspects of my existence. In short, as a human being, I am a unity of physical and metaphysical components, rather than a union of physical and metaphysical components, which establishes my identity in the presence of God.

Concerning my posthuman identity as an agent in the world this is a question that I have asked myself: Do I critically undertake to construct my future, or do I remain satisfied with my pre-critical status? The real problem is not whether the world will change or whether it will remain the same. The real problem is whether the world will change of its own accord, without my influencing presence, or whether it will be changed deliberately, consciously and with my participation.

While there is no possibility to return to the past, the shaping of my future life-world does require an analysis of the past without re-living it. In analyzing the past, I am conscious of myself, not as a static being, but as an active free agent in the presence of other active free agents within the presence of God. In constructing my future becoming I have not chosen a traditional philosophical view point, nor any foundation provided by an up-dated classical understanding of human purpose. Rather, I have chosen to look to the future and actualize myself in the present as an agent consciously bring about alternatives to constructing my identity.

In my philosophical musings I have made the same discovery as many philosophers before me. That is, my relation to reality is a self-relation. It was only after I had learned to define my life in terms of consciousness that I came to appreciate the significance of the process by which I had become conscious of my self-relation to reality in the first place. To be conscious of reality is not to interact with it as if it were one of many objects. Reality, which is beyond existential being, is not susceptible to objectification. However, being which is real, can be objectified. That is to say, all being is real, but not all reality is being. To assume that every entity is constituted as a self-contained necessity is to reject the possibility of any dynamic activity and remain within a static Hellenist mind-set. Rather, to be conscious of reality is to differentiate myself within it, by my becoming, by reflecting upon it inwardly and by experiencing it hylomorphically, as a unity of the tangible and the intangible.

In my understanding, then, when I create a “new” life-world and identity it is tantamount to transcending the “old” world. In undertaking a phenomenological approach to interpreting my experience, I have reached a level of self-consciousness and self-creativity that views the Hellenic dichotomy as an option not to be repeated. My consciousness presents itself when distinguishing between “me” and “not-me.” That is, I am distinguishable within the physical world of beings, and I distinguish myself to myself as part of the dynamic world of my becoming. As my consciousness is heightened, I continually differentiate myself within my life-world and grow as a person with a unique identity. As I differentiate myself from that which is not myself, my consciousness is also heightened. Thus, I am a self whose identity is disclosed when I differentiate myself from others. I am an entity which comes into being, and whose existence emerges through self-differentiation. In such self-differentiation I am contingent because I make myself “to be” within my environment, that is, I fashion myself creatively. The ultimate result of my consciousness is an awareness of my self-possession. In short, I assign myself an identity.

In creating my becoming, I encounter pre-determined (inherited) categories to which I assign meaning whether such categories are pre-determined by the nature of the mind, as Kant thought, or by the nature of being, as the pre-Kantian philosophers thought. The truth or error in my understanding depends on the authenticity of the *relationship* between me, as subject, and the

other, as object, and not on the accuracy of the intellectual *apprehension* of an object by me as a knowing subject. In short, I have dehellenized truth or error in my thinking.

The term dehellenization is not a negative term. That is, it is not un-hellenization. I experience dehellenization as the conscious creation of my life-world and identity in a non-Hellenic fashion. Within my intellectual history I have come to understand that the task to which philosophy calls me is not the dismantling of traditional metaphysics and the reconstruction of a new metaphysics, but rather the transcending of any metaphysics reflecting dichotomous roots. That is, I have rejected traditional Hellenistic metaphysics in favour of a consciousness that lacks substantive ideals. Thus, I am intellectually living at a non-Hellenistic, posthuman threshold of becoming.

It is understandable that St Thomas thought that the scholastic way of thinking was the only methodological way of thinking given his context. However, I am conscious of the fact that there is no necessary methodology for me to differentiate my becoming within reality and, as well, that no methodology of differentiating within reality is natural or privileged. My world is now one of increasing personal responsibility and my problem is one of finding an appropriate intellectual and philosophical methodology through which I may respond to my old (human) and new (posthuman) experience. A posthuman understanding has the capacity to incorporate my entire person through my senses, emotions, intellect, and will in the act of knowingly being

conscious. As a consequence, I am conscious that my contingent human experience is not a total experience. I may overcome this insufficiency, however, via a holistic understanding which allows for something greater. When I incorporate my holistic experience my becoming equates to nothing less than my quest for ultimate meaning. In short, my quest for ultimate meaning is philosophically and theologically tantamount to my identity seeking understanding.

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## EXAMINERS' REPORT

Date: 1 July 2010

Reference: ASOI/07/2010

Student: Allan Maurice Savage

Degree: Doctor of Letters

The candidate presented a portfolio of publications for assessment accompanied by a critical commentary in line for the regulations for the degree entitled "Interdisciplinary Insights Applied within a Theological Context". The portfolio was extremely wide-ranging and included work principally in the area of theology and secondarily in the areas of philosophy and psychology.

In addition to previous degree awards and ministerial appointments, the portfolio contained two testimonials from the Bishop of Algoma attesting to his appreciation and high regard for the candidate's work in ministry.

The evidence of achievement in line with the Regulations for the granting of the degree of Doctor of Letters by published work was amply displayed. The high level and scope of the work undertaken was clearly evidenced and offered a contribution to scholarship that was both original and unusually broadly-based. It was clear that the candidate had thoroughly absorbed the corpus of existing thought in his chosen areas, and had shown himself to be both a cogent expositor of the scholarship of others and an original thinker in his own right.

The candidate supplied a detailed exegesis in his critical commentary that considered each submitted work in turn. The examiners greatly appreciated the role of this approach in clarifying the intentions, methodology and context of the works concerned. The candidate also included a list of the libraries which have acquired at least one of his books. He concludes that "their acceptance tells me they determined that my books 'have something to say' of academic value to the university community and perhaps to the civic community at large." The examiners endorse this conclusion and commend the work involved accordingly.

It is invidious and necessarily subjective to single out examples of particular work in a submission that was uniformly impressive, but the three books “A Phenomenological Understanding of Certain Liturgical Texts: The Anglican Collects for Advent and the Roman Catholic Collects for Lent”, “Faith, Hope and Charity as Character Traits in Adler’s Individual Psychology with Related Essays in Spirituality and Phenomenology” and “The Ecology: A ‘New to You’ View (An Orthodox Theological Ecology)” were held by the examiners to be of particular merit.

The examiners felt in summary that the submission was of an exemplary quality and reflected exceptional achievement over a sustained period of time. The award of a higher doctorate does not permit the conferral of marks of distinction, but in this case it was felt that the submission was such as to have merited this accolade were it to have been available.

Andrew Linley, D.D. (Convenor)  
Vice-President and Director of Administrative Affairs  
Percy Dearmer Professor of Liturgical Studies

John Kersey, Hon.LL.D., Hon.D.Mus., D.D., Ed.D., Ph.D.  
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